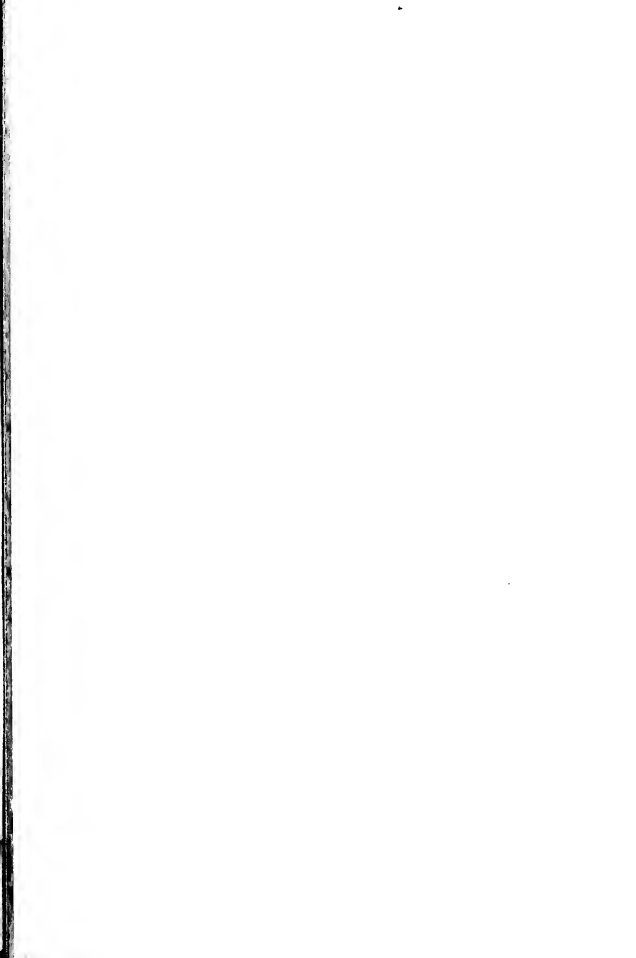


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A Ship of Souls
by
Hervey White







A SHIP OF SOULS

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My soul is not one: 't is a ship of souls,
And I am the vessel in which they ride.
Some handle the ropes and manage the sails,
And one at the helm stands firm to guide.
Some board me for pleasure, and some for gain,
And some make journeys to distant goals,
And my life is steered through the sun and rain,
For I am not a soul, but a ship of souls.

When I was a child, the soul folk that rode
Were out from the country of eagerness.
And the bark was new, and the ways untrode,
And they laughed or wept with like willingness.
They had no knowledge that ships have laws,
Or that seas have dangers that none controls,
They shouted, and quarrelled, and dared, because
They were never one, but a ship of souls.

When I was a youth, Ambition stepped on,
And chose himself captain, and stood at the wheel,
He blustered and bragged of the deeds he had done
And I was atremble from bow to keel.
And he ran me aground in the frozen seas,
He had dreams of tropics, and steered toward poles,
And the others worshipped on bended knees,
For I was not one, but a ship of souls.

Love came to be captain at later time,
And my life ship leaped upward straight for the sun.
And orders were issued in metric rhyme,
And psalms were chanted in unknown tongue,
And none were aware that a ship needs sea,
And in sea needs a bottom not full of holes,
And none took note of poor floundering me,
For I was not I, but a ship of souls.

In time, I learned harbors, and weathered storms,
I learned not to chafe when the pilot ruled,
And folk came aboard me well versed in forms,
And I called them not hypocrites all befooled.
I preferred deep water and steady trade,
But was patient in tempest, and gentle in shoals,
And the good folk chatted and were not afraid,
For I was not one, but a ship of souls.

Back and forth to my harbors year after year,
I carry my freightage of passengry,
Some friends stay with me and hold me dear,
And many make moan at the sickening sea.
But little attention they give to their ship,
They watch their places, and call their rolls,
They know that my years like the billows slip,
That I am not I, but a ship of souls.

And I know little, except of grooves,
Of planes and motion, not up or down.
They speak of thickness, but nothing proves
To a one planed vision like that I own.
They speak of directions I do not know:
Of zenith and nadir, opposing poles,
But they keep me on levels where they will go,
For I am no more than a ship of souls.

Flights of the angels are not for me.
Depths of the divers are not my ken.
I glide on the surface, a one planed sea,
If I learn of a deep, it will be but when
I have broken the bonds of my time and space,
And the skeleton, Death, on my ship's bell tolls
And I meet my Maker face to face,
Who made me not me, but ^aship of souls,

Only one memory I would take
In the lonely plunge that will give me light,
Only one memory when I wake
In the third dimension men call height;
One of a ship that would pass me by,
But hailed me not, for the law controls,
It had no knowledge of what was I,
For it was not one, but a ship of souls.

Only one memory of its wings:
Snow white, swan like, God's sweet bird,
Lost all others of time and things,
Strength, fame, conquest, never a word,
Only one memory when I wake,
When I leave all parts, and look out on wholes,
Only that ship for our love's sweet sake,
When we two are one on a ship of souls.

When we two, together, a life can know,
And look to the heavens, God's light above,
When we look down, too, on the sins below,
And think how they gave us the word of love,
When we feel the firm vessel that bears us on,
May we love and honor our bark as it rolls,
And be glad that it, too, when its work is done,
Will be a soul, not a ship of souls.

Only a memory after death,
Only a memory new in life,
Fade all else with the fading breath,
Cease all struggle, and end all strife,
One sweet vision of fleeting wings,
Clouds of earth, as away it rolls,
End of matter, and end of things,
God, in a glory of endless souls.

A little child looked wonderingly
 Within the magic of the sea.
The sea looked back, and softly smiled,
 Watching the wonder of the child.

And what the child saw, deep and far,
 Was all the mysteries that are:
All things that have been, and will be,
 He saw there hovering in the sea.

And what the ocean saw as well,
 Was all the secrets he could tell:
What had been, and what will be, smiled
 Within that little wondering child.

We sail between two seas. We are not bound
To one, as it would seem on hasty glance.
The one beneath, through which our hulls advance,
Is the reflection on a grosser ground,
Of one which stretches limitless around,
And shines abroad with its own radiance.
We cannot lift ourselves to that frail realm,
But that proves not to us it is not there.
We know it as we know the wind and air,
As we know water crowding on the helm.
We cannot sail into the nadir's sea,
And, yet, we do not doubt its right to be.

The lower sea is ours: and we are his.
We are built up from out his elements.
We will dissolve again and settle thence
When he desires once more his entities.
Just as the foam from his waves' friction is
Tossed up and reabsorbed in somnolence,
So we chafe up from his wind troubled deep;
And flash our little gleam of consciousness,
Reflect the light that Heaven sends down to bless,
And then subside to our eternal sleep.
For, while 't is true, there will succeed more foam,
It will not be our bubbles that will come.

The upper sea, or sky, is ours as well.

But his we are not. He is ever ours.

We build there palaces and stately towers

Wherein the ones we love may safely dwell.

'Tis true we sometimes build the pits of Hell,

We take our choice of brambles or of flowers,

But what we build remains. Knows naught of time.

Once there created it will ever stand

Substantial in the world idea land

To speak our shame or tell our thoughts sublime.

It may, or may not cast its shadow down

Into the nether sea, where all shades drown.

We sail between two seas. The sky above

Is boundless as the sea that lies below.

We cannot either way find means to go

Into the essence, all to know thereof.

But, vaguely, through our will, and through our love,

We bind together these two regions, so

It is made possible for them to be.

They, through our willing, enter into life.

Just as, through love of husband and of wife,

The child is born for all eternity.

It has, as well, its spirit and its clay,

The one to live, the one to pass away.

Strange mysteries of the unknown and the known!

Strange play of dying life and living death!

The soul eternal struggling for a breath,

The gasping insect swift eternal grown.

The world unconscious calling back its own,

The world, grown conscious, giveth, flourisheth.

We may not question as we sail our track.

We need not ask of whither, whence, or why.

It is enough for us, we live, we die,

We look ahead, around, and sometimes back.

Only, we should remember, Argosies,

We sail not one, we sail between two seas.

Yeo ho! My ship is on the sea!

Yeo ho! Yeo ho!

Yeo ho! The winds are fair and free!

Yeo ho! Yeo ho!

I've waited long both wind and tide.

I've dreamed of ports all far and wide.

And now, I ride, I ride, I ride.

Yeo ho!

Yeo ho! I leave all cares behind!

Yeo ho! Yeo ho!

Yeo ho! I groped as one stone blind!

Yeo ho! Yeo ho!

But now, the light is sweet and strong.

I feel my might. I fear no wrong.

And life smiles all my course along.

Yeo ho!

Song birds fly from off the shore,
Carolling, carolling,
And the messages they bring
Leave our hearing never more,
For 'tis of the land they sing,
Land of spring,
Blossoming,
Song birds fly from off the shore,
Carolling,

White clouds come to meet our ships,
Argosies, argosies,
Sailing in the rarer seas
Where the blue of ether slips
Into valleys sweet with trees,
Summer's ease,
Droning bees,
White clouds come to meet our ships,
Argosies.

Mountain tops gleam far away,
White with snow, white with snow,
And the blessings they bestow
Are of everlasting day.
They have seen the long ago.
They will know
Afterglow.
Mountain tops gleam far away,
White with snow.

Companion ship, to sail with me,
Freighted with souls, along life's sea,
Shall we, together, pioneers,
Take on new ventures. through the years?
Shall we, together, meet the shocks
Of alien shallows, sunken rocks,
Not following the charted ways,
Secure in prosperous peaceful days?
Were it not worthier we should brave
The unknown storm and untried wave,
E'en though they end in watery grave?

A watery grave is all the end
Of every ship, companion friend.
Were it not fitting we should sleep,
Not where the other ships pile deep,
But in some lonelier lovelier place,
To break the bonds of time and space:
And open our new seeing eyes
In Eve's and Adam's Paradise?
Their Eden surely had more view
Because they walked there, only two,
So would it be for me and you.

Embrace the winds from ways unknown.
They are much sweeter than our own.
How flashes out the frozen North!
What though an iceberg swift stand forth?
Its glittering green walls, vitreous,
Are softest pasture fields to us.
Its underlying hidden shock
Is rarer play than bell buoyed rock.
Heave onward, then, on final trip!
And pledge, with dashing foam on lip,
Our enterprise, companion ship!

The sea, as it seems from its surface gleams,
Knows naught of motion, and naught of streams.
But underneath, in the deep below,
It breathes its breath, and strong currents flow,
And there is no death, and there is no sleep:
But a steady drifting and undertow,
That seems like sleep, but is shifting dreams.

And these dream tides flow from the long ago.
And how they travel, and whither they go,
There are none to tell, and none to hear;
But we know full well that the world's birth year,
And its marriage bell, and its funeral toll,
Are ever returning, are ever near,
As the ages roll, as the ages grow.

And we hearken here for a message clear,
But no word is spoken of hope or fear:
They are dreams, all dreams: vague and meaningless.
Be they turgid streams, or swift vividness,
They are still but dreams; and, disheartened,
We turn our eyes to the sky's caress,
Though we bless our dead with a parting tear.

But the dreams we bless in our hopelessness
Are ever flowing with soft caress
On our good ship's side, 'neath the close lipped waves,
As we smoothly glide o'er the templed caves,
And their lights abide in our darkened souls
As a living tress shines in dead loves' graves.
Or as memory strolls through forgetfulness.

Strange monsters dwell within the mirrored deep
On which our ships are gliding peacefully.
We sometimes see, or sometimes think we see,
When entering the borderland of sleep,
Or yet, when coming back half dazedly,
The swirl and eddy of a flippered bulk,
The glint and sheen of wily watchful eye,
The waters quick close in and sullen lie,
Not first reflecting our known sail and hulk.
The waters close their gates of mocking lead,
As close the graves on our beloved dead.

We say we dream. We tell ourselves we dream.
There are no monsters on our one planed track.
We talk of sunshine: and we look not back
To where the waters coil in snaky stream,
To where the sky is lowering inky black.
We look ahead, and shout of wind and sun:
These things are real. These things we see and know.
We strike the water and it gives back blow,
And we call out and tell it every one.
We will not whisper of those things unseen,
That are not now, and never could have been.

And, yet, within ourselves, we feel, we feel
That underneath the shining surface keen,
Some huge leviathan doth sport unseen,
And round our course doth swiftly swerve and wheel.
We feel it seize the slipping floods between
Its flippered arms. We feel the water slide
Adown its gleaming belly scaled with bone,
We hear its muffled shriek, like some faint moan,
Waft up along the piteous waves beside.
We look ahead, and talk of lands and flowers,
And play droll games to while the tedious hours.

We know that if but once we gave ourselves
To thoughts of those grim monsters hovering there,
If once we stopped to look and listen where
The bubbles rise like gasping mouths of elves,
We know that we should never more seem fair
To other ships that sail with us the seas,
The very seas would tarnish and turn dim,
The skies would deaden to horizon's rim,
And all the green turn gray in land's sweet trees.
We know that flowers would lose their sweetest breath
If once they guessed we knew those whelps of death.

For we have seen how other ships have turned
To toy in dalliance with some lewdsome shape,
(And who, once tainted, ever shall escape
The sickening smell of slime that all have learned,)
And we have seen the yawning floods agape,
And shuddered as the inky skies fell down,
And we have hurried onward breathlessly,
And hailed the headward sunshine on the sea,
And gained with gratitude the harbored town:
Then, if, perchance, returning from the shore,
We meet that ship, we welcome her no more.

What do we know? Ah, which of us shall tell?
How do we know that any wrong was wrought?
Belike that ship with her whole strength has fought
The fiend that died to drag her down to Hell;
Belike those elfish fires have burned up aught
There was of flesh that poisons now our frames;
Belike she sails now purified and strong;
And underneath, shapes follow her along,
And sing her psalms, and call her saintly names;
We only know that we with that foul ghost
Had reveled, raged, and in his clutch been lost.

We do not hail her when we meet her now,
We turn aside as shunning one unclean,
She may be that. She surely that has been.
And we have, oh, so innocent a prow,
And little children play our decks between,
But how is it we know that smell of slime?
Why do we shudder at the unthought sin?
If we, ourselves, have never dabbled in
The flood we so abhor and call foul crime?
Vain, vain to ask. We sail upon our way,
Though sometimes, deep within, we swiftly pray.

We pray, for us, those shapes may never rise,
"Sweet Christ, let not their lurements draw us in,
Oh, Lord, thou, too, stoodst on the verge of sin
While Satan held thee with black opal eyes.
Lord, Lord, thou wert of God, God's nearest kin,
We are but mortal, born of dust of earth,
'Tis hard for us, who hold a wavering mind,
To say to Satan, 'Stand thou there, behind,'
'Tis hard for us, who come of sinful birth,"
Our hope lies not in struggle, but in flight,
We fly, we fly, and leave the inky night.

But we have dreams, perhaps we have regrets,
Of those vague forms that sport within the waves,
Perhaps they are not ghouls, that gloat on graves,
But spirits cursed, whom prickling memory frets,
Perhaps they are the grinding ocean's slaves,
Who seek a little comfort in our grace,
While we speed on in panic of wild fear,
Not daring them one glance, or word of cheer,
'Tis said some of them have a woman's face,
Ah, woman, what sin hath not took thy charm
Since Eden Lilith touched young Adam's arm?

Men mated once with fishes in the sea,
And offspring had they, wild and sweet of form,
Mermen and maidens sporting in the warm
Soft depths of ocean, skilled in minstrelsy.
Their father's fate? Who was there to inform?
'Twas said their songs would lure weak humans down,
Their breasts were ivory, their salt wet hair
Gave out thin briny perfumes to the air
That none resisted: choosing but to drown,
To drown, and clasp their scaly sterile thighs,
And gasp out life in bubbling barren sighs.

Ah, days of Pagan, never more to rule!
If days of Puritan must pass as well,
Who is there of us that could hope to tell?
It may be, Knowledge next will form her school,
And trace her precepts on the welkin's bell.
We do not know. We shudder, and speed on,
We shun the whirlpools of black ignorance,
And, praying to our man god for the nonce,
We ride our erring weaker sister down.
The laws are strict. The harbor must be made.
Ships are but helpless: they must sail, -and trade.

When sunset glows
O'er tropic seas,
And blue and rose
Blend harmonies,
The waves like oil
Of spice and myrrh,
Coil within coil,
With cat like purr,
Weave mystic toil
Of Lucifer.

The lilac lights
To purples shade,
From gleaming heights
To shadowed glade.
The winds, at rest,
Give out no moan,
And pink possessed
Doth quickly tone
Into the zest
Of murder done.

Crimson the flood
 Is sweltering soon,
Putrescent blood
 Of brown maroon.
Darkling, the East
 With stealthy tread,
Like ghoulisn beast,
 With crest reared head,
Gloats on the feast
 Of blackening dead.

The thick night falls.
 The rising wind
With clamor calls
 That Christ has sinned.
The huge sea shakes
 His prison bars,
His earth bed quakes
 With raging wars:
Then, Heaven wakes,
 Behold ! the stars !

The skies stand high today.
Blue are they, of a tinct cerulean,
And in the height of zenith floats one cloud,
A long white bar of flaking floculence,
That casts no shadow on the smiling sea,
And serves for me an island continent
To build my wharves along.

High rides the sun without,
And, like great bird, sails o'er the settled world,
Watching, but not descending.

And my ship glides on,
Plying her paddles in the willing waves,
Unconscious of her breathing moving force,
Leaving me free to sail among the skies,
To choose my course, or rest, as is my will,
Laved by the ether floods of boundless space.

Here is the log of my dreams' journeyings :

With my companions three we speed the blue,
Unfreighted all, except love's ballasting,
And after many days of favoring winds,
We enter in our harbor with the dawn,
Piled on each side with dusky purple hills,
On which the gleam of marble palaces,
The peacefulness of vineyards, and soft grays
Of ancient olive groves, rest like God's blessing ;
And, underneath, the opal deep of fire
Pales with the paling saffron of the East,
And stars sink down and quivering reappear,
Mild beaming planets, and green twinkling suns,
Fires of the blue and gold of unknown worlds,
Until, our own sun, jealous of his realm,
Leaps up, a ball of fire, from out the sea,
Pauses a moment, like an eagle, there,
Before he lifts the radiance of his wings
To take his steady and untiring flight.

Faint songs of wood birds trill within our ears,
And perfumes of the land of fruit and flowers
Float through our senses with their soft caress.
Aboard, we hear the stir of ropes and chains,
And quick before our waking is aware

We find our decks aswarm with inland souls,
Brown skinned, sweet smiling, almond eyed, alert,
Offering their treasuras for our paltry gold,
While, o'er the side, the thrum thrum of guitar,
The stately passion of a woman's voice,
Tells we have reached the land of sun and song,
The land of islands in the purple mist,
The cream white cliffs of Southern Italy.

With leisure we're ashore, facing the town,
Within whose crescent amphitheatre,
Sparkling with jewels in the morning sun,
We make our way along the level quays,
Murmuring with traffic of far foreign ports,
Gay with pure colors of kaleidoscope,
Smelling of fruit and tar and salt of sea,
Mingled with heavier odors underneath,
Odors of toil and sweat and filth of life,
Faint warm suggestions of o'er hovering death,
Till we have gained the rising steps beyond,
And slowly mount within the channelled street,
To where the city takes us to her arms,
And breathes upon us her voluptuous breath.

Clamor of bells is sounding in our heads,
Clamor of million voices calling wares,

Jingle of harness and the roll and crunch
Of countless wheels o'er jolt of paving stones,
It seems the very skies besiege our ears
To daze and frighten us to yield our gold.
But equably we keep our even way
To where great gardens widen in green squares,
And fountains leap to emulate high palms,
And children play, and all is cool with flowers.

How beautiful the shadows of the trees!
How restful the smooth stretches of green grass!
On high, and all around, the city smiles,
Still rising in facades of creamy stone,
Banded and spiraled with street terraces,
Up to the very summit of the hills,
To where old frowning castles cloaked in green
Chant of the days long dead beneath the sky.

Once more we climb and rest and climb again,
Till we have reached that palace waiting us,
Wherein we sit in garden balcony
Looking out widely o'er the shimmering bay,
Content to be our simple selves at home.

When clear skies favor 't is an easy thing
To steer our course straight to the end desired.
The sun, though sailing like a hawk on wing,
Has yet fixed resting place when he is tired.
And though at night he settles on his nest,
And will not rise again till day returns,
We know that point is always on the West,
And will be East when once more morning burns.
We need not question why this thing should be,
We know it is, and steer accordingly.

And if, at night, not waiting for the sun,

We wish to know our bearing, or our place,
The stars stand ready, pointing out, each one,

They, too, in steady march of time and space.
Their clocks are sure, their guide boards do not fail,

We read aright as swift we speed along,
We think them made for us, and we avail

Ourselves of their perfection, never wrong.
'T is true, they, too, sink down beneath the waves,
But others come, and stand above their graves.

But vapors rise and dim the sky with clouds.

For seas have vapors, as the eyes have tears.
The sun pales as one dying, and enshrouds

Her ghastly visage with o'erpowering fears.
The mourning seas glaze over with dull lead,

The blue of faith has fled from out their deeps,
The very winds, in sighing for the dead,

Turn, waver, veer, like woman when she weeps.
Then, then what shows to us the way to take,
And makes it possible the port to make?

Each ship has locked within its bony breast
A conscience box, or compass, tested, true,
That knows no sleep, and knows no need of rest,
But tells unerringly the thing to do.
No matter what soul captain has command,
No matter what the other souls advise,
He has it always ready at his hand,
A guide that never wavers, never lies.
If he but follow what that voice doth tell,
We forge ahead and know that all is well.

'T is true this compass only points the way.
It only knows of falsehood and of truth,
It has no thought of winds that may betray,
It takes no cognizance of untried youth ;
It only points with index ever sure
The course direct, without its snares and toils.
Its faith knows but the one thing, to endure,
No matter how the shallow water boils.
But let the captain lose it from his sight
And all is wrong, nor ever can be right.

The wisest captain keeps beside this box
His written charts, the world's experience.
They tell of shallows and of hidden rocks,
And teach him caution in his swift advance.
But let his eye once leave the compass, there,
The charts no longer have significance,
He may as well give up in vexed despair,
The charts have not one line to lead him thence.
They but supply the facts in terms contrite.
The compass tells the right, the only right.

Who fashioned it ? the scoffers may exclaim,
Is it not the result of knowledge learned ?
Is it not made by man ? Has it no blame ?
Shall all experience be overturned ?
They know not what they say, or do not care,
They see some cloud and think it is the land,
Or, seeing land, they think it must be fair,
And are for stopping ; though they understand,
Deep in their hearts they understand and know
The compass tells the way they ought to go.

Disaster, sure disaster them awaits,

They may enjoy a while their isle of palms,
They may think all winds blow toward Heaven's gates,
And sport and revel in this zone of calms,
But time will bring the lurking hurricane,
And time will open up the gulfs below,
And, if at last, they get afloat again,

They will be fearful when faint zephyrs blow.
So much they have been weakened, in a word,
They think it was the compass that has erred.

What nobler sight than to see noble bark

Steer through the tempest to its own self true,
To stand ahead, no fear of choking dark,
No need of sun or stars to help it through,
The captain steady, close beside the wheel,
His eye unwavering, all his lights aglow,
True to the conscience compass he can feel,
Interpreting by it those charts "I know",
Not boastful of himself, and worldly wise,
And only sure his compass tells no lies?

What nobler sight, unless, when storms are o'er,
The good ship rides upon the smiling seas,
The voyage ended, and afar, the shore
Stretches in goodly green of fields and trees ?
But, even then, the captain at his post,
Stands yet beside his faithful compass true,
Grateful to it his good ship was not lost,
Ready to see another voyage through.
And so the ship shall serve its term of years,
Nor ever dream of doubts, or wrecks, or fears.

Wide wild the winds sweep o'er the sea,

Huzzah!

The waves toss up their caps for glee,

Huzzah!

The sails fly swift in bellying clouds,

Shrill scream the sheets and straining shrouds,

And sea birds swirl in skurrying crowds.

Huzzah!

The storm rack scuds the greening deep,

Huzzah!

No more for sailors now of sleep,

Huzzah!

Furl, furl the sails and make them fast,

Cling to the bowing bending mast,

The hurricanes are ours at last.

Huzzah!

Ride, ride good ship, the storm is o'er,
Huzzah !

We catch the breeze from off the shore,
Huzzah !

Well now we know the strength we own,
We stood the blow, and stood alone,
We feel we are now men, full grown.
Huzzah !

We all have weathered storms. If storms were not,
How should we know that we were seaworthy?
We do not seek them. If, through prophecy,
We learn their whereabouts, we yield a jot,
And sail around, or wait a calmer sea.
But he who fears a storm and leaves not port,
Or else skulks round the coast in petty trade,
He knows not stuff of which good ships are made,
And, spite of wisdom, bears a coward's heart.
To shun a voyage, fearing storms may lurk,
Is but to show one's self a sham or shirk.

We all know storms, God shield and pity us!
We are not those to proudly toss the head,
And flash bold look into the lightning's dread,
And rail at old Dame Nature's blunderbuss;
We did that once when youngly spirited,
Not now, not now: we know of breach and strain
That may not hold throughout another test,
We know, if there be need, we'll do our best,
But we'll not court the twisting hurricane,
We'll do our duty, make our voyages,
And take what fates may send, or gods may please.

We have known storms. Ah, God, the bitterness
Of biting wind! Of sea's fierce briny tears!
Remorse of all the future's owing years
Will not grind out that sickening distress,
That sense of falling through the lawless spheres,
The dizzying whirl, the flash of baleful fire,
The lurching heave of the enmaddened deep,
The cannon shock of waves in downward sweep,
As though the seas were balked in their desire,
If we were not o'erwhelmed, not stricken dead,
'T was not because of rage enweakened.

Calms follow storms, weak convalescent calms,
In which we lie upon the placid tide,
And care not whether we may sink or ride,
As careless of all nature's soothing balms.
If wish we have, 't is only we may hide
From out the glaring vision of the sun.
We do not think of battle any more.
We only know the hateful hating shore
Lies smiling there, now easy to be won.
At length, we sail into the harbor's peace,
And sadly look on other ships at ease.

To be alone
When the wild winds moan
And the waters groan
 In their troubled sleep,
Is to feel the need
Of a steady creed
On a charted screed
 Of the trackless deep.

To face the waves
From the terror caves
Of our fathers' graves
 As they leap aboard,
Is to know the prayer
Of a heart laid bare,
To beseech the care
 Of our blessed Lord.

To endure the blast
As it snaps the mast,
And the skies, aghast,
 See Hell's pit blown dry,
Is to know the flood,
The infinitude,
Of the love and good
 Of the God on high.

To see the sun
When the storm is done
And the course is run,
 And the land's caress,
Is to dream of sleep
Where the angels keep,
Is to weakly weep
 Out of blessedness.

Much horror has been wasted on those ships
Whose souls have fled from off their littered decks
And left them derelicts, though hardly wrecks,
To know no more of wharves or piers or slips.
We all have said, when viewing their old age,
How we hope we will never know like end,
To drift companionless, no foe, no friend,
Not even memory for a heritage;
But, often, I have watched these weathered hulks
Drift, drift the currents, at the ocean's will,
And failed to find that ghost which lurks and skulks
In many a fairer ship that has thoughts still.
The sun smiles down on them, the cool rain falls,
And conscience never pricks, nor duty calls.

It seems to me no curse to idly float,
To turn in favor to each shifting wind,
To have no sailing orders safely pinned
Within the pocket of some captain's coat.
Because one's work is done we need not think
That life must end upon the very dot,
Or, if old stops and journeys are forgot,
One must of course uncompromising sink.
Why should the body not, if flesh be firm,
If bones be strong to bear and bind the frame,
Consume that food stored up within the germ,
And burn the lamp out with unfaltering flame?
There may be joy in plant life: just to grow,
That no souls know, nor yet have need to know.

To rest, to float, to lie upon the tide,
To feel the water's body softly breathe,
Old Father Ocean, steady underneath,
Is not so cruel if we only bide.
'T is when, intent on our own wills, we ride
Self charged, tyrannical, across his form,
He leaps up hurt in sudden wild alarm,
And with impatience pushes us aside.
But, if like play tired children, soft we sleep,
His love is of a giant's when at ease,
We rise and fall on his calm breathing deep,
His arms enclose us in, and melodies
Of old primeval chaos, rich and slow,
Soothe us, unconscious, in the long ago.

Old geologic lullabies he croons,

That pregnant life first crooned to molding form,

Deep heaving, rhythmic, potent with the swarm
Of constellations wild, and whirling moons ;

The land's young life, swaddled in ocean's slime,

Heard, still unhearing, consciousness in bliss ;

The first sensation was the parent's kiss,

Down, down through epochs of enduring time.

So still the mighty father soothes and sings,

So cradles he in swinging swaying arms

The ship returning free from life's alarms,

The ship content to leave off trade and things,

Smiling, at rest, between the sea and sky,

What need has it of deeps? What need to die?

The souls are dancing on my ship,
Round, round, they swing,
And song leaps up from every lip,
Wild carolling,
There is a flashing of white hands,
And rhythmic feet weave lacing bands
Within the music's braided strands,
And rafters ring.

There is wild revel in my heart,
Throb, throb with joy,
And laughter leaps my breast athwart,
Ship, Ship, Ahoy!
Come, whirl with me the level seas,
The winds are out, I catch the breeze,
I ride, I ride the waves with ease,
A mad merboy.

There have been pirate ships in days of old,
Fierce, swarthy, daring, Death's head for a flag,
Greedy and bloody, rich in curse and brag,
Their only appetite for glut and gold;
They hovered, threatening, in bat winged guise,
And kept the birds of day in constant fear,
Fat, well fed geese, ready to be the prize
Of any bastard outlawed privateer.
Those days are ended now. Geese swim at ease,
And squawking penguins, paid, patrol the seas.

Dear days of flitting bats, and battlements,
Dear vampire superstitions of the dead,
We know no longer, now, the untold dread
Of omens ill, and like entanglements.
The ladies, sometimes, still, evoke weak screams,
When wayward wings wheel flapping through the air,
For pirates have the weakness, still, it seems,
To get entangled in a lady's hair;
Old husbands storm, still, grim proprietors,
And lady swears, still, 't was no fault of hers.

But times are changing, and will change the more.
E'en now the pirates are our better halves.
They leave us bawling like fresh milk fed calves,
And drive the wolf, not out, but in the door.
We watch them board some governmental ship,
We call out pitifully that they come down,
We know our mechanism sure will slip,
Can hardly float, now, and must surely drown.
But ladies change their minds, their end once gained,
And come back calmly to be diamond chained.

This is digression. Let us now return

Unto our mutton. Pirates all are sheep.

Black ones, of course, whom shepherd cannot keep
Within the fields proscribed. But, ever spurn
Fat pastures salaried with grass and graft,

The steady stream of incomes and of stocks,
Who rather play with art and handicraft

Than feed on banks with pockets full of rocks.
Some will paint pictures, some will write a poem,
Some paint themselves, but still we always know 'em.

They always whistle when they pass a gate.

(Forget now, please, the sheepish metaphor,)

As well forget, too, those old ships of war,
Or in the background let them vaguely wait.
The pirates of these days must use their legs.

And though they've never one to stand upon,
You ne'er will see the man who starves, or begs,

Though, if a cast off garment, gaily thrown,
Should light upon his shoulders, I confess
He likes it better than cold nakedness.

They're fond of children, though they rarely have 'em.

Not that 't is their fault, but 't is social law.

'T is for staid merchants to be called papa,
And walk the floors at night with hymns to Heaven.
The merchants' wives look from their ivory towers,

Towers made of wood, but white like ivory,
And think "How kind it was to send those flowers!"

And plan a little luncheon, or pink tea.
The merchants' dogs, ah, they're the pirate's friends!
And, even hogs, he hails as citizens.

For friendship he has genius. And for love.

Love o'errules friendship, if put to the test.

But all his loves of North, South, East, or West,
Will not o'errule his honor. That's above.

'T is said, there is an honor among thieves,

I sometimes doubt if honest men possess it,
The pirate never hides beneath the leaves

His summer's theft. Nor yet does he confess it.
He whistles carelessly with hands in pockets,
While scandals burst and blow like fiery rockets.

He rather likes the smell of gunpowder,
It clears the sky and crinkles up the hair.
The pungent odor and the hazy air
Will something serve as grateful cloak to her
On whom his real affections have been placed.
As for the other ladies, let them go,
'Tis what they like, playing the double faced,
They sought the scrimmage and they love it so ;
If husbands, fat, phlegmatic, stand amazed,
'Tis good for them to be a little dazed.

But back to friendship. Friendship will come back
When games of love have grown a little stale.
When hair grows scant and youthful blushes pale,
There still is time to choose the safer track.
Old vanities and jealousies forgot,
This hardened case, or case hardened old sinner,
Will gladly share his boon companion's lot,
Accept a drink and settle down to dinner.
If gossip rises out of smoke and coffee,
'Tis to amuse, and not dragged in as trophy.

For pirates, even pirates, leave to youth
The energy of bragging and of boast.
And if perchance sometimes they do get lost
While sailing on the phantom seas of truth,
'Tis not because they're really fond of telling
Of their own conquests. That is for the clubs.
The 'l' is oft omitted in the spelling,
And pirates oft call merchants merely cubs.
No matter: now we've got them in deep water,
We'll leave them there with all their harmless potter.

No, no, we can't; the main thing is forgotten;
They have a goddess called The Beautiful.
And, at her bidding, always dutiful,
No matter though their methods oft are rotten,
They stand, bold pioneers, to clear the way.
They delve, they build, heedless of hope or shame,
Each one alone, yet all together stay,
And raise aloft the temple of our fame.
They will not worship there. They'll all be buried.
And books will tell why 't was they never married.

Some blessing has come down. I know not where
It lies, nor whence it came, nor how.
I only feel it, now, pervade the air
With some sweet happiness, some added store,
The world is richer than it was before.
The moment was, I lacked; 'tis ended now;
There is no treasure that I could not share
With meanest beggar and have plenty more.
Some blessing has come down. I know not how.

Some presence sits within. I know not who
It is, nor whence it came, nor why.
Perhaps from out the sky, cleaving the blue
Like white winged albatross, it came to me,
Becalmed, and weary of the stagnant sea.
I am not weary now. The waters lie
Without a ripple, and the calm holds true.
There is no change in outward things I see,
But all within is changed. I know not why.

Nightingales are singing in shore gardens,
Butterflies are sleeping on the flowers.
Not for me are Heaven's land blessed pardons,
Not for me the rest of sleeping hours.
I must live alone upon the billows,
To and fro in duty's voyages,
Tossing waves for sleepless lonely pillows,
Even harbors know the surge of seas.
Some are born to dwell among the meadows,
Toiling through the day to sleep at night,
Sleep for me is but the shifting shadows,
Moon and stars still wavering in light.
Ever in the silence of their beauty,
Ever in the laughter of the sun,
I must sail the endless track of duty,
Never stopping, never pitied one.

Even in my grave, the waves above me
Toss, and fling their arms above my head ;
Naught of flowers or grass to stilly love me,
Naught of rest to greet the weary dead.
Always mine a breathing swaying motion,
Swirling monsters gliding through the deep,
Ever changing ever wondrous ocean,
Not one drop in all thy wealth of sleep.
Dreams I have of rocks and mountains stable,
Dreams of changeless sleep within the lands,
But my very dreams grind rock to sable,
Mountains melt to treacherous shifting sands.
Each must live the life unto him given,
Each must die the death to him ordained,
None can turn the tyranny of Heaven,
Constellations are by law enchained.
Still, we pray, when shoreward in the gardens,
In the peace the nightingale still sings.
Still we beg impracticable pardons,
Praying to the heartless god of things.

Fogs sometimes close upon us with thick dread,
Faint, smothering, we gasp and choke for breath,
It seems there's no escape from instant death,
We groan, we strain, would be already dead.
We quite forget what we have oft been told,
That land is near, it lies on either hand,
That currents warm warring with currents cold
Foretell the land, the waiting promised land.

If weather wise in sea's experience,
We know 't is time to slacken up our speed.
We know that jagged rocks with good ships bleed,
Hurl'd there by reckless man's extravagance.
We know 't is time to hearken for the bells,
And ever watchful at the helm to stand.
The fog to us its joyous message tells,
'T is land, 't is land, the blessed promised land.

Sound, sound the slug horn, then, against the mists.
Drive slow, and do not run a brother down.
What though the pungent moisture still persists?
Danger there is, danger that all may drown.
But let your heart keep courage and endure.
The journey's end is near, the port at hand,
And steady patience renders all things sure,
And land, the land, the blessed promised land.

When the winds blow in sweet from the landward,
When the white caps flash out their glad foam,
When our sails swell their breasts rich with passion,
With the pride of the swift coming home,
When all hearts aboard are set yearning
For the loved ones who wait on the shore,
Then comes the swift swirling of sea gulls
To greet our successes once more.

White flashes of wings in the heavens,
Like the clapping and cheering of hands,
Shrill screams of old battenning gormands
From these scavengers haunting the lands,
Sea's vultures, not the sea's eagles,
Fierce gluttons that feast on the dead,
Oh, clamoring white coward sea gulls
That fight for a stale crust of bread!

We were lonely far out on the ocean,
With our desolate wake trailing back.
How willingly then we had thrown you
Good food to companion our track.
But you shunned the drear march and the battle,
Faint hearted, you clung to the town.
Unwept and unknown we had perished
Had our ship in the tempest gone down.

But, returning, successful, you greet us,
With rustle and clamor of wings.
We might think at first sight you were angels
Till we hear your shrill chatter of things.
You are vultures, you never are eagles,
We see while we hear your applause,
You are not even vultures but seagulls,
Web footed and flabby, no claws.

You can swim? Yes, in that you are graceful,
You can float with the incoming tide,
All the better to pick up such sewage
As drifts by your elegant side.
Your plumage is white as the heron,
You are glossy and fat with your pelf,
But your heart has no love and no daring,
Your hope has one aim, that yourself.

So when we ride in to the harbor,
If ride in, please God, we may do,
And if tears stand unshed at our eyelids,
Don't think, cheering crowds, they're for you.
They're for gratitude safe out from dangers,
For the safety of smiling green lands,
And not for the chatter of strangers,
Or the flapping of web fingered hands.

There is a wind that dies with the sun.

The sun and the wind sink down together.
And the stars come trembling one by one,

And the sailors say it will be fine weather.
For the wind that dies with the dying sun
Leaves soft smiles smiling on every one.

There is a light that glows in the West,

A look of love on the face of Heaven,
And all hearts glow with a sense of rest,

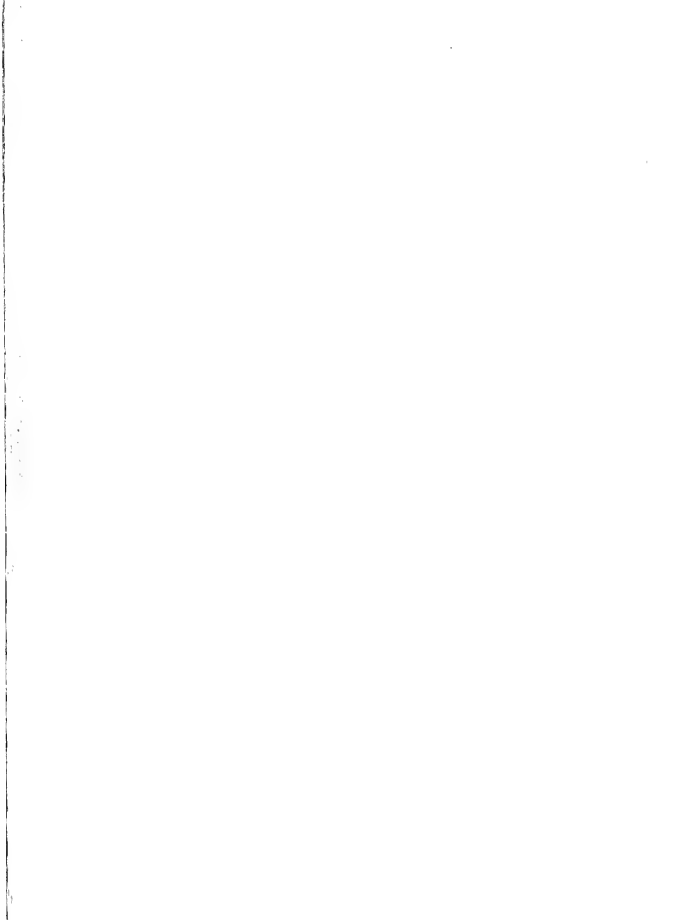
And are stilled with the rose of the skies at even.
For the light that all of us love the best
Is the rose light glow in the loving West.

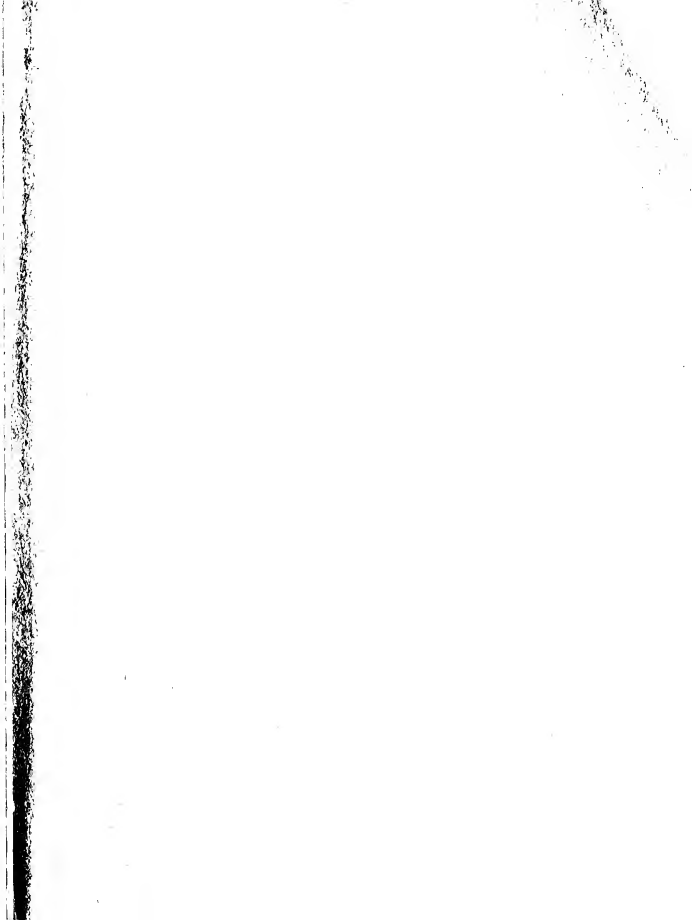
Lulled in the swings of Hesperus,
Borne in the arms of the Western breeze,
Heaven's high bell to vesper us,
Tingling the Northern Hebrides,
Yellow of gold to cover us,
Cradled on breast of the breathing deep,
Wings of the West to hover us,
We rest, we sleep.

Sun gives his clouds to glory us,
Sea gives his deepest Tyrian dyes,
Stars give their myths to story us,
Deeds of the gods in Paradise,
Balm of the earth is blessing us,
Calm of the ocean breathing deep,
Palm of the West caressing us,
We rest, we sleep.

Draught from the cup of Morpheus,
Cut from black opal, shot with fire,
Dregs of a flower to torpor us,
Flower of red passion and desire,
Dark of the East to cover us,
Dews of the night to sweetly weep,
Dreams of the West still over us,
We rest, we sleep.

New souls are on my ship! New souls!
There is a wreathing of white arms,
A swirl of misty draperies at the feet,
Floating of seaweed for a sense of hair,
And eyes, ah, eyes are dewy lambent flames,
Fire out of water, union of elements,
It is as if the opposites of life
Are blended in their beaming buoyancy.
I melt, I burn, I soar, I live again!
New souls! New souls!





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